

Willis Bristol House
584 Chapel Street
New Haven County
New Haven, Connecticut

HABS NO. CONN-274

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5-NEWHA

26.

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
1730 North Lynn Street
Arlington, Virginia

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

THE WILLIS BRISTOL HOUSE

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Location: 584 Chapel Street, on the south side of Chapel Street opposite Academy Street and southwest corner of Wooster Square, New Haven County, New Haven, Connecticut.

Present Owner: James A. Cozzolino, 264 Willow Street, Hamden, Connecticut.

Present Occupant: Tenants of apartments.

Present Use: Apartment house.

Statement of Significance: Designed by Henry Austin. Nineteenth century house of Italianate block design with Indian Islamic details. It is in good repair and in almost original state.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: Willis Bristol purchased three deeds of land for his house; one with a building which he razed, two to the south of this lot apparently to accommodate outbuildings and garden. Following is an incomplete chain of title. References are to New Haven City Land Records by volume and page, and to New Haven City Directory where noted.

March 1, 1845 Charlotte Prudden (acting by order of Probate Court) to Willis Bristol for \$2,718.59, "Land with dwelling house, North by Chapel Street, East and West by land of H. and L. Hotchkiss, South by land of William Bunnell et als..." April 10, 1845, Alfred Terry, Town Clerk.

March 31, 1845 Jane A. Prudden to Willis Bristol for \$281.41, "Land with dwelling house, North by Chapel Street, East and West by land of H. and L. Hotchkiss, South by land of William Bunnell et als..." April 7, 1845, Alfred Terry, Town Clerk, Vol. 112, p. 485.

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- July 16, 1848 Hervey Hoadley to Willis Bristol for \$3,100; (Two pieces of land, side by side, bounded northerly the above lot).
- 1875 Land and house inherited by Mrs. Willis Bristol (New Haven City Directory),
- 1876 Mrs. Bristol sold property to Louis S. Ullman (New Haven City Directory).
- February 24, 1917 Sold by Mrs. Louis Ullman to the Congregation Mogen David, Vol. 796, p. 276.
- June 12, 1919 Sold to Louis Lupo, Vol. 844, p. 325.
- June 30, 1919 Sold to Abraham Lander, Vol. 850, p. 440.
- February 27, 1933 Sold to Matteo Santateresa, Vol. 1289, p. 75.
- August 24, 1943 Sold to James A. Cozzolino, Vol. 1445, p. 246.
2. Date of erection: Probably 1846, when Willis Bristol was first listed as residing at 198 Chapel Street (later numbered 584), New Haven City Directory.'
3. Architect: Henry Austin, 1804-1891.
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: Austin's original floor plans and elevations are deposited in the Beinecke Rare Book Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.
5. Alterations and additions: Aside from the oriel windows of undetermined date, on the first floor west wall, there have been very few exterior alterations. Interior was divided into apartments (without major structural changes) c. 1933.

The present owner, James A. Cozzolino, has been guided by the New Haven Preservation Trust in his maintenance of the house.

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:

Willis Bristol appears to have been a prosperous citizen. He was senior partner of Bristol and Hall (boots and shoes).

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Bristol's house at 584 Chapel Street was retained in the family until 1876. The house and lot remain much the same today despite frequent sale and variety of uses as the Mogen David Congregation House; as a school, beauty parlor, and apartment house.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Primary and unpublished sources: Arnold G. Dana, "New Haven Old and New," unpublished scrapbooks in the archives of The New Haven Colony Historical Society, 114 Whitney Avenue, New Haven, Connecticut.

Interviews with John D. Hoag, Art Librarian, Yale University Art Library, New Haven, Connecticut. Chairman, Standards Committee, New Haven Preservation Trust.

The New Haven Land Records Office Archives, Land Records Office, Hall of Records for the City of New Haven, Orange Street, New Haven, Connecticut.

Henry Austin, "Dwelling Houses, Stores, Banks, Churches, and Monuments, designed by Henry Austin, New Haven, Connecticut;" two bound volumes of manuscript drawings in the Beinecke Rare Book Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.

2. Secondary and published sources: The New Haven City Directory, 1840 to 1952, copies in the Yale Library, Public Library, Town Clerk's office, and New Haven Colony Historical Society Library.

Prepared by: Jonathan B. Conant
Research Assistant
National Park Service
August 31, 1964

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Although the general scheme of the house is of Italianate villa design, the architect has created an exotic character in his adaptation of Indian Islamic details concentrated on entrance portico, windows, doors, balconies, and interior arches.

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The two-and-one-half story house of three bays has hipped roof of very low pitch with square monitor cupola, eaves of six foot projection, and arcaded piazzas. Plan has center hall.

2. Condition of fabric: Good, with many original exterior details and some interior details intact.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The main block of the house is a perfect square 43'-2" x 43'-2". A one-story wing and porch on the rear measures 10'-0" x 40'-2". Besides the two main floors and attic, there is a basement partially below grade.
2. Foundations: Exterior walls of basement are of granite ashlar below grade; interior walls of basement are brick.
3. Wall construction: Exterior and interior bearing walls are brick. The exterior of main block is finished in scored stucco painted brown. There is a granite string course at first floor level. Exterior of rear addition is brick.
4. Porches, stoops, balconies: The front (north) portico has flat roof and heavy wooden turned baluster columns. Columns are joined by wooden arches cusped in the Islamic manner with applied ribbon designs of wood on exterior faces. The broad flight of exterior steps of 9 risers is splayed and enclosed with solid wooden balustrade which has applied wooden lambrequin strip under the wide hand-rail on both sides of balustrade. The hand-rails end at massive squat newel posts consisting of circular fluted segment with base and square block capital.

The rear porch, reached by modern steps, is also high above grade and enclosed by a wooden balustrade less ornate than front porch balustrade. Under both porches are open areaways a few feet below grade which give access to basement. Deep stone-faced areaways are used to light sub-basement.

Cast-iron balconies are located at windows in end bays at both levels and are supported by light cast-iron brackets. First floor balconies have quatrefoil-patterned rails and spiral corner posts. Second floor balconies have rails of lozenge pattern and identical corner posts.

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A similar rail caps front porch roof.

5. Chimneys: Four symmetrically placed chimneys, two on each side.

6. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: High double doors of wood and glass at front and rear entrances, are identical; upper sections have luxuriant treatment based on Islamic arches at the head glazed in a pattern of colored and decorated glass. The lower section is treated with an applied fretwork of wood. A heavy wooden arch of fretwork frames the doors.

The arch is also treated in relief with applied wooden decoration. Total effect of doorway and arch is one of exotic richness in three dimensions.

- b. Windows: Front and rear windows have double-hung sash and clear glass. Lower sash has rectangular units; upper sash terminates in scalloped arch outline defining a decorative pattern of curved and radiating muntins.

Second floor side windows are double hung, with complex muntin pattern in upper sash, six lights in lower sash. Arches of the pattern used throughout are set in the jambs at the head of each window.

In addition, there are two later metal-sheathed oriel windows on the west wall at first floor level. These have three narrow one-over-one lights, curved corners and curved projecting cornice. Four windows on east side of rear addition are double-hung, two-over-two light with flat cornices.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape: Hipped roof of very low pitch.
- b. Cornice, eaves: Unusually wide (6') overhanging eaves with flat wooden soffits supported by four widely spaced pairs of heavy brackets with pendant bosses on each elevation.
- c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: A low glazed square monitor cupola is centered on the roof, functioning as clerestory opening in attic.

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C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Basement: Basement rises approximately 50% above ground, is entered under front porch, and has center hall plan. Western half now houses dental offices. There is a sub-basement below basement.
- b. First floor: The building has been converted into apartments with one dental office in the basement. A comparison of the existing first floor plan with architect's original drawings indicates that the greatest modifications took place on the western portion of the building. The original two-inter-connecting rooms have now been partitioned into three rooms. The original west wall, formerly blank, now has a fireplace, two bay windows and a double window.
- c. Second floor: Plan is now modified for apartments, was originally similar to first floor, except that there were three rooms on west side and chamber over front entrance.

- 2. Stairways: There is an impressive stairway at the rear of the central hall ascending in 21 risers toward front of house in a straight run with 45° turn near top. The stairwell is open and surrounded by a balustrade at the second floor. Mahogany handrail terminates in a sweeping vertical volute resting on carved and turned newel post of ample proportions. The open string has simple applied ornament. Stairs to basement are below main stairs. Attic stairs are at right angles to main axis of house and are enclosed behind a paneled door in the upstairs hall.
- 3. Floors: On the first floor, the later basketweave parquet oak floors have an inlaid border of light and dark wood; border is omitted on upper floor.
- 4. Wall and ceiling finish: Comparatively recent plaster with wooden moldings forming panels on all first floor walls.
- 5. Doorways and doors: All hallway doors on both floors are identical six-paneled wood; two center panels are

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rectangular in shape, upper and lower two panels are square. The recessed panels are framed with applied molding, and in the two center vertical panels there is an applied vertical pendant block which recalls motif on exterior balustrades. Architraves have 3/4 bead on inner edge, simple flat band on exterior edge. Plinths and baseboards are unmolded blocks. Between foyer and central hall there is an arch of Islamic design which repeats outlines of entrance door. Arch is constructed of wood and has applied decorative pattern in relief.

6. Decorative features and trim: Foliated plaster cornices on first floor and trim described above. Stair stringer has apparently original graining.
7. Notable hardware: None.
8. Lighting: Modern electric fixtures.
9. Heating: Originally by fireplaces and, possibly, a central hot air system. Northwest fireplace on first floor has white marble mantelpiece with rounded-arched opening, carved keystone and spandrels.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: On the north side of Chapel Street, with Academy Street ending at Chapel on the axis of the house. The house faces the southwest corner of Wooster Square, a relatively intact 19th century square.
2. Outbuildings: Modern brick multiple garage.
3. Landscaping: Low hedge borders front sidewalk and driveway on west side. Back yard is asphalt paved.

Prepared by: Woodrow W. Wilkins
Supervisory Architect
National Park Service
August 1964

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III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records and six sheets of measured drawings were prepared as part of the Summer, 1964 New Haven Project, jointly undertaken by the HABS and the New Haven Preservation Trust, and financed by "Mission 66" funds of the National Park Service with assistance from the HNPT, following a 1963 HABS inventory survey of old New Haven carried out by the HNPT under the direction of Professor Christopher Tunnard of Yale University, President.

The project was under the direction of the Eastern Office of Design and Construction, James C. Massey, HABS Supervisory Architect, and was supervised by Architect Woodrow W. Wilkins, Professor of Architecture at the University of Kentucky, assisted by Ned Goode, Photographer, Frazier, Pennsylvania; Annette H. M. Gottschalk, William P. Hersey, and Charles R. Tichy, Student Assistant Architects and students at Carnegie Institute of Technology, Yale University, and Iowa State University, respectively; and Jonathan B. Conant, Research Assistant and student at Yale University.